

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT CH

SUBJECT: TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME, IN PEKING?

REF: STATE 213861

EA PLEASE PASS AMB BUSH

1. ADDRESSEES WILL HAVE SEEN PRESS REPORTS OF BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL GAMES PLAYED IN PEKING AND SHANGHAI BETWEEN CHINESE AND VISITING JAPANESE TEAMS (MEN'S BASEBALL, WOMEN'S SOFTBALL) A FEW WEEKS AGO. COMMENTS BY JAPANESE EMBASSY OFFICIALS INDICATE THE PRC LEADERSHIP REALLY IS INTERESTED IN PROMOTING THIS SPORT. THOUGH LONG IDENTIFIED IN THE CHINESE MIND WITH THE AMERICAN IMPERIALISTS (AND WITH THE JAPANESE MILITARY FORCES THAT OCCUPIED CHINA DURING WWII), BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL WOULD OF COURSE ADD TO CHINA'S RESOURCES FOR SPORTS EXCHANGES WITH JAPAN, THE U.S. AND OTHER BASEBALL COUNTRIES.

2. JAPANESE EMBOFFS TOLD US THE CHINESE HAVE RECENTLY BUILT FOUR OR FIVE BASEBALL STADIUMS AROUND PEKING, SOME IN TIENTSIN AND SHANGHAI, AND PROBABLY ALSO IN SHANYANG, WUHAN AND SIAN, SINCE THE JAPANESE PLAYED TEAMS FROM THESE CITIES. THE HEAD OF THE ALL CHINA SPORTS

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FEDERATION SEEMED PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING

BASEBALL AND ATTENDED MANY OF THE GAMES WITH THE JAPANESE.

3. AT PRESENT THE PRC TEAMS ARE HARDLY A WORLD SERIES THREAT, OR EVEN COMPETITION FOR THE TAIWAN LITTLE LEAGUERS. THE JAPANESE BASEBALL TEAM--AN AVERAGE TO BELOW AVERAGE COLLEGE TEAM--COULD NOT CONTRIVE TO LOSE A GAME EVEN BY INTENTIONALLY FUMBLING THE BALL AND MIXING UP SIGNALS TO RUNNERS ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS. THE CHINESE SEEMED TO HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY APPLYING THE RULES AND TACTICS OF THE GAME (E.G. THEY KEPT TRYING TO PUT OUT A MAN RUNNING FROM THIRD TO HOME RATHER THAN THROWING TO FIRST ON A ROUTINE GROUND BALL WITH TWO OUT). AND WHEN SOMETHING DRAMATIC HAPPENED ON THE FIELD, THE ANNOUNCER HAD LITTLE SUCCESS IN EXPLAINING IT TO THE OBVIOUSLY IGNORANT MASSES IN THE STADIUMS. IN SHANGHAI, AS ONE WOULD EXPECT, THE CHINESE TEAM WORE PROPER ATTIRE, BUT THE PEKING AND OTHER PROVINCIAL TEAMS WORE SOCCER JERSEYS AND OTHER MAKESHIFT UNIFORMS.

4. ON THE SEVERAL OCCASIONS IN THE LAST TWO YEARS USLO OFFICERS HAVE RAISED WITH THE PRC SPORTS OFFICIALS THE QUESTION OF BASEBALL AS A SPORT IN CHINA. THE OFFICIALS HAVE GENERALLY MADE VAGUE REFERENCES TO HAVING ENJOYED THE GAME AS YOUNG MEN, BUT ADDED THAT IT WAS SELDOM PLAYED IN THE PRC THESE DAYS. USLO OFFICERS HAVE SEEN CHINESE YOUTH TOSSING A BASEBALL BACK AND FORTH ONLY ONCE (IN SHANGHAI), WHICH SUGGESTS MINIMAL SANDLOT INTEREST IN THE GAME. HOWEVER, THE CHINESE ALREADY ARE BUILDING AN INTEREST IN BASEBALL AND BOTH BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL GAMES ARE PLANNED AS PART OF THE THIRD ALL CHINA GAMES.

5. COMMENT: ALL IN ALL, PERHAPS IT IS A BIT PREMATURE TO CONSIDER BASEBALL AS AN AREA FOR US-PRC SPORTS EXCHANGE.
THAYER

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